



**Illinois
Department of Commerce
& Economic Opportunity**

JB Pritzker, Governor

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DCEO Celebrates Asian American & Pacific Islander Heritage Month Across Illinois

CHICAGO – The Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity (DCEO) today launched its Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI) Heritage Month celebrations which include a [proclamation](#) recognizing AAPI Heritage Month, spotlighting AAPI-owned businesses, hosting a series of business resource events and elevating community events throughout May 2023. Additional information about resources and events can be found [here](#).

“Illinois’ diversity is its strength and spotlighting and supporting Asian American and Pacific Islander-owned businesses during AAPI Heritage Month and beyond is a top priority for DCEO,” **said DCEO Director Kristin A. Richards**. “DCEO remains committed to providing essential resources to AAPI business owners across Illinois to create an inclusive business ecosystem while expanding opportunities for communities. Illinois’ doors remain open for all, and DCEO will continue to be a steadfast partner for AAPI communities doing business in the state.”

Throughout AAPI Heritage Month, DCEO is honoring the AAPI community and the nearly 22,000 AAPI-owned businesses with employees and more than 77,000 AAPI-solopreneurs. Additionally, for the first time in state history, DCEO hired an AAPI Business Development Manager – an Office of Minority Economic Empowerment (OMEE) team member dedicated to supporting the growing AAPI community.

“Celebrating AAPI Heritage Month provides an opportunity to recognize the diversity and significant contributions of the AAPI community, while also advocating for the end of the ongoing anti-Asian hate crimes and discrimination,” **said State Sen. Ram Villivalam (D-Chicago)**. “By supporting Asian-owned businesses, which often serve as important community gathering places, we can help promote economic growth as well as send a strong message that we stand with and support the AAPI community. May this month be a time of reflection, education, and action, as we work towards creating a more just and equitable society for all.”

AAPI-owned businesses continue to prove their resiliency and fortitude as they persevere through the rise in anti-AAPI sentiments and hate crimes in their communities since the onset of the pandemic. DCEO is committed to creating an equitable and inclusive business environment through significant investments in equity-based programs, outreach, and funding opportunities.

“AAPI Heritage Month is a time to honor the rich cultural diversity, and recognize the invaluable contributions, of Asian and Pacific Islander Americans, which serves as a powerful reminder that our differences are a source of strength and should be celebrated, not feared or marginalized,” **said State Rep. Theresa Mah (D-Chicago)**. “Given that the AAPI community continues to face barriers, anti-Asian sentiment, and violence, as well as systemic bias, it is important to do all that we can to support the AAPI community in Illinois. As our Illinois Asian American Legislative Caucus grows, it will enable us to better advocate for our communities so that it will not be possible to make policies about us without us.”

DCEO AAPI Heritage Month Events:

DCEO's Offices of Minority Economic Empowerment (OMEE) and Regional Economic Development (RED), alongside community and civic groups curated the following virtual events featuring business resources, highlighting the AAPI community's resilience, and recognizing AAPI businesses and their contributions to Illinois. Participants can learn more and register for events on DCEO's [AAPI Heritage Month page](#):

Event Name: Overview of Financial Capital Resources

Event Date/Time: Wednesday, May 3, 10:00-11:00 a.m.

Event Location: Virtual – [REGISTER](#)

Description: During the monthly *Online with OMEE* series, Team OMEE provides the latest financial capital resources offered across the sectors, state and federal programs, and other opportunities for business owners and entrepreneurs. In honor and celebration of AAPI Heritage Month, the May *Online with OMEE* will also feature additional resources for AAPI-owned businesses and future founders.

Event Name: Advancing the AAPI Community Through Opportunity

Event Date/Time: Wednesday, May 24, 10:00-11:00 a.m.

Event Location: Virtual – [REGISTER](#)

Description: Hosted by OMEE and the Illinois Small Business Development Center (IL SBDC) at DCEO, the virtual event is part of the monthly webinar series, *Advancing the Development of Minority Entrepreneurship* (ADME), which features a different topic and presenter each month. In recognition and celebration of AAPI Heritage Month, Illinois Small Business Development Center at Chinese Mutual Aid Association (IL SBDC at CMAA) will lead the presentation during a panel discussion with AAPI leaders in the small business support ecosystem.

More information on AAPI Heritage Month and instructions to sign up for events in May can be found at visit [DCEO's website](#). Updates on other small business supports available can be found by calling the First Stop hotline at 1.800.252.2923 or following DCEO at [@IllinoisDCEO](#) for updates on programs.

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